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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [AR](#)  
SUBJECT: Argentina: Logistical Challenges in Convening  
June Mid-Terms

Ref: Buenos Aires 360

Classified by DCM Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

11. (C) Summary/Introduction: The GOA's decision in mid-March to move up the legislative elections by four months (ref A) has raised concerns among local observers that some organizational requirements, such as voter registration and the identification and manning of polling places, may not be satisfactorily accomplished by the new June 28 election date. Paper of record "La Nacion" quoted one high-level Argentine electoral official complaining that there is not enough "time to solve administrative problems that require modification of prevailing regulations." With an eye to addressing these issues, the Electoral Court has urged citizens to verify that they are registered and called for volunteers to work at polling places on Election Day. While these challenges are not new, moving up the elections has put greater stress on an already weakened electoral system. Given the expected close battle in voter-rich Buenos Aires Province, extensive reports of problems on June 28 could easily generate controversy and mistrust. As part of our continuing coverage of the June mid-terms, this cable identifies key logistical challenges to convening the elections and will be followed by a primer -- closer to the mid-terms -- on the voting process. End Summary/Introduction.

12. (SBU) The GOA's decision in mid-March to move up the legislative elections by four months (ref A) raised concerns among local observers that some organizational requirements, such as voter registration and the identification and manning of polling places, may not be satisfactorily accomplished by the June 28 elections. Paper of record "La Nacion" quoted one high-level Argentine electoral official complaining that there is not enough "time to solve administrative problems that require modification of prevailing regulations." This official added, "no one can assume that these elections are going to be smoother than the 2007 (presidential) elections." Memories of problems then, including polling stations opening late, long lines for voters, and reports of missing party ballots, are still fresh in the minds of some voters. Additionally, "La Nacion" reports that voter rolls in 2007 had a suspiciously high number (26,290) of people over the age of 100, implying the voter rolls had not been adequately updated and purged of dead voters.

Election Organizing Entities

13. (SBU) The elections are overseen by the Ministry of Interior's National Elections Board, whose president is Alejandro Tullio. However, the National Electoral Court (CNE) is responsible for the implementation of the

elections, including voter registration, approval of party ballots, the identification and manning of polling places, and vote counting. Argentina does not use a unified ballot listing all candidates for voters to choose from. Instead, the Interior Ministry provides funds to political parties to print their own ballots.

#### Doubts about Voter Registration

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¶4. (SBU) The compressed electoral schedule has heightened voters' concerns about their registration status. "La Nacion" reported April 22 that 3.5 million Argentines responded to the National Electoral Court's April 14 request that citizens verify their voter registration. One Embassy contact bemoaned to poloff that such calls more likely reflected greater distrust in the electoral system as opposed to increased interest in voting. Voters who are not included in the registry must advise the Electoral Secretary by April 29. As of April 22, there were 50,000 voters in the Federal District who needed to be added to the voter registry, according to "La Nacion". Argentines must present a national identity document (DNI) to vote, which a March 2009 presidential decree has made available free-of-charge from birth until the age of 12. The DNI must be renewed twice for a \$15 peso fee (approximately US\$ 4.00) with the final renewal occurring at the age of 16 when the Electoral Court is notified for inclusion in the national voter registry. This renewal process can last an average of six months. Embassy contacts point out that the DNI can be easily falsified. For example, the daughter of a congressional staffer was not able to vote in the 2007 presidential elections because she and another individual were mistakenly given the same DNI number. Although the April 29 deadline for voter registration has passed, the total number of voters registered for the June mid-terms has not yet been published.

#### ...And About Polling Places

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¶5. (SBU) Local observers also point to the difficulties in ensuring that there are sufficient polling places and election authorities to staff them. Embassy's locally employed staff note, for example, that in the Federal District many schools, which typically serve as polling stations, are under renovation and consequently alternative buildings will need to be identified. The deadline for announcing polling places is May 29.

¶6. (SBU) Questions also persist over whether the government will be able to recruit or draft enough election authorities ("autoridades de mesa"), including a president and at least one alternate, to preside over each polling station throughout the country. For Buenos Aires province, "La Nacion" estimates there are 30,000 polling stations, which would require at least 60,000 election authorities. Similar to the U.S jury duty system, voters can be randomly selected to serve as election authorities. Training is not obligatory to serve as an election authority, but voters can access training material online, including a course created by the Argentine chapter of Transparency International, Citizen's Power (Poder Ciudadano). Although there are penalties, including six months to two years in jail for failing to serve as an election authority without prior notice, 65% of designated poll workers in Argentina's largest cities did not show up on voting day in 2007, according to "La Nacion". In the Federal District, Buenos Aires City Judge Maria Servini de Cubria has opened 900 cases against individuals who, without justification, failed to report for duty as election authorities in 2007. Sixty cases have been processed so far -- no one has been sent to jail, but several dozen have been tasked with community service. In addition to election authorities, parties will also send "fiscales de mesa" representatives to observe the elections and the

subsequent vote counting. Parties must designate their "fiscales" by May 29 and election authorities must be determined by June 8.

#### A Call for Volunteers

17. (SBU) With an eye to addressing a potentially low turnout of election authorities, the Electoral Court called for election volunteers in early December 2008. "La Nacion" reported May 5 that 1,239 people have volunteered to work on June 28, a total that would not cover 1% of the polling places. Additionally, the Buenos Aires Supreme Court approved a petition by the province's Electoral Court allowing federal judges working in the province and other high-level justice provincial officials to serve as election authorities. The Electoral Court has also expanded the call for volunteers to students in public and private universities that are not registered with a specific party.

18. (C) Comment: While these challenges are not new, moving up the elections has put greater stress on an already weakened electoral system. Given the expected close battle in voter-rich Buenos Aires Province, extensive reports of problems on Election Day could easily generate controversy and mistrust.

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